



SUNDAY 28 JUNE 2020

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Saints Peter and Paul (A): Matthew 16: 13-19

If I asked a rhetorical question in a homily, Betty would sometimes call out an answer. Other times she'd make a comment. What she thought was a stage whisper could be heard in the back row. It certainly got folks listening. The homily then became a conversation. Heads moved to and fro from Betty to me and back again, Wimbledon style. I was occasionally tempted to arrange Betty's intervention in advance but never did. The spontaneity was what made it work. It was like playing with live ammunition.

Peter and Paul addressed groups and crowds. Paul built communities. They'd have met a few Bettys. Peter changed from fishing to preaching. Paul from making tents to building networks. Supported by the Spirit and by prayer they learnt by doing, gaining experience through success and failure. We do the same - or we should. Courage is one of the Spirit's sevenfold gifts. Staying within our comfort zone inhibits learning, growth and initiative. It doesn't square with the Gospel. Betty helped others to think and ask questions.

Don't underestimate the extraordinary changes Peter and Paul were required to make in their own lives. Their inner doubts, the opposition from others, the breaking new ground and learning on the hoof reminds us they were human and imperfect like us. Their trust in the Lord grew because it had to. Does this cause you to stop and think? These two men would be delighted if it did.

Be grateful for the power of the Spirit in the time of Peter and Paul. Recognise the hard graft, the momentous decisions required, the openness to the promptings of grace. We inherit their work and continue it.

The Church is the community of the followers of Jesus. Our personal style of following Jesus now probably has a pattern we've developed over the years. Let Peter and Paul be a challenge. Have we become too settled, consumers or customers of what the Church provides, or are we active and thoughtful innovators, sharing God-given insights? Like Betty, do we voice our curiosity because we want to know more?



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Pope Francis' message for the World Day of the Poor

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to spread across the world, Pope Francis told Christians and people of goodwill that "until we revive our sense of responsibility for our neighbour and every person, grave economic, financial and political crisis will continue."

"We cannot feel alright when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows," Pope Francis said in his message for the World Day of the Poor, on June 13.

He reminded believers worldwide that the Bible teaches us that "prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable". The silent cry of so many poor men, women and children should find the people of God at the forefront, always and everywhere, in efforts to give them a voice, to protect and support them in the face of hypocrisy and so many unfulfilled promises, and to invite them to share in the life of the community.

In these months, Francis said, "when the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen!" He pointed to the outstretched hands of physicians who cared about each patient and nurses who worked overtime, for hours on end, to look after the sick. He also mentioned so many other "outstretched hands" administrators, pharmacists, priests, volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home yet nothing to eat, and those who worked to provide essential services and security.

Then, like the prophets of the Old Testament, not mincing his words and calling people to conversion, Pope Francis devoted a whole paragraph of his message to those who to date are not responding to the biblical command. "stretch forth your hand to the poor." He told his global audience, this command "challenges the attitude of those who prefer to keep their hands in their pockets and to remain unmoved by situations of poverty in which they are often complicit. Indifference and cynicism are their daily food".

"This pandemic arrived suddenly and caught us unprepared, sparking a powerful sense of bewilderment and helplessness," the Pope said. "Yet hands never stopped reaching to the poor. This has made us all the more aware of the presence of the poor in our midst and their need for help".

Moreover, he said, "the 'end' of all our actions can only be love. This is the ultimate goal of our journey, and nothing should distract us from it. This love is one of sharing, dedication and service, born of the realisation that we were first loved and awakened to love".